

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)  
(Ezekiel 18:25-28 / Matthew 21:28-32)  
01.10.2017

Dear brothers and sisters,

We are quite familiar with the two sons of the parable, aren't we? The reason is simple: these two sons dwell within us. Who among us has never said "Yes" to God's will in prayer and then forgotten to do it? Or who among us has never said "No" to God's will and then changed his or her mind for the better?

First, let us look at the second son of the parable, the one who says "yes" to God's will and does not do it. Does it never happen that we answer positively to the Lord's invitation and then we forget it or, if we begin to respond to it, we very quickly change our mind? Does it not happen that we answer God's will and then we follow our own desires? Or, to quote one of our French Fathers in monastic life, does it not happen that "Nous rapinons l'holocauste", that is to say that little by little we take back what we had initially offered to God. And what is true for our relationship with God is also true for our relationships with one another, for our promises made to one another.

Newly married couples have no problem saying "yes" to one another on their wedding day but they can find it increasingly difficult to keep their promises through the ups and downs of a long-life commitment.

The same is true for those who one day solemnly promised to remain celibate and chaste for the Lord.

Something similar is true for those who, at the beginning of their adult life, choose to live their work, their political engagement, and their social or leisure activities in accord with gospel values, that is to say: dealing with others in an honest, respectful and loving way, in a spirit of service. How often we experience that the desire for self-satisfaction alone and personal interests little by little begin to take first place in our hearts at the expense of the Christian values we had chosen initially.

We may be saying "yes" to God on Sunday and turning our back to Him during the rest of the week.

We may say "amen", when we receive the body of Christ in communion and say "no" a few minutes later when we refuse to speak to someone, help or forgive a member of the community who is also to be seen as Christ. There must be a continuity, a harmony between what we say and what we do.

If our "yes" to God does not take on flesh in our ordinary lives, then it is only a lip service. If our "yes" to others is not implemented day after day, then it is only an idle promise.

Perhaps what we need to grasp is that it is not a matter of saying "yes" to God once and for all, but that we have to constantly renew our "yes" to God each and every day. We are not saved once and for all, but we have to receive our salvation day after day and live in accord with it day after day.

In order to constantly renew our “yes” to God’s will, we have to be faithful to prayer. Prayer is that intimate encounter with the Lord during which we can evaluate our life and renew our engagements. What is true for our relationship with the Lord is also true for the promises we make to one another.

Prayer is also the moment where we are reminded that we cannot say “yes” to God or to one another and remain faithful to our “yes” relying only on our own strength alone. To succeed, we need God’s help, we need God’s grace.

Let us come back to the first son. He refused to do God’s will and then thought better of it and did it. Let us not be shocked by the initial refusal of the first son: Who among us can say that when the Lord calls us we are ready and eager to answer: “Here I am Lord; I have come to do your will”. I believe the initial refusal of the first son can and should be a source of comfort for us who are sinners. With this attitude we are in the tradition of the Gospel and the Church. Let us think of Jesus at dinner with tax collectors and sinners. When the Pharisees expressed surprise by the presence of the Lord at their table, Jesus answered them: “I did not come to call the virtuous but sinners. It is not the healthy who need the doctor but the sick”. Let us think also of Saint Augustine who was ready to follow Christ but tomorrow and not yet today. And then finally, one day, Augustine consented to follow the Lord for always. Better late than never! To become aware of our refusal to do God’s will, to be conscious of our infidelities to the promises we have made to others should not be something we deny or hide, rather it should be something we take on board as an opportunity to repent and come back to the Lord, to repent and renew our commitments with one another. The good news is that with the help of God’s grace, we can change the direction of our lives for the better. It is for this reason that “tax collectors and prostitutes (both probably at the service of the Roman occupying forces) are making their way into the kingdom before us.

We could take a few minutes today to answer these two questions: Where do we stand in regard to the fulfilment of God’s will in our lives? Where do we stand in regard to the promises we have made to others?